

## LISTERIOSIS

### What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a disease caused by a group of bacteria called *Listeria monocytogenes*. The bacteria are found worldwide, including New Brunswick. They live in the intestines of infected people and animals (particularly cattle, pigs and poultry) and are passed in the feces.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear about three weeks after a person has become infected with the bacteria. Most persons who become ill have only mild illness. Symptoms may include fever, muscle aches, nausea and diarrhea.

### How is Listeriosis spread?

Bacteria are passed in the feces of infected persons and animals and can be found in water and soil contaminated with sewage or animal waste disposal. Persons with poor personal hygiene and traces of feces on their hands may contaminate food, including ready to eat food and food handled after cooking. Bacteria may also be found in improperly processed ready to eat meats and soft cheeses. Surfaces can also be contaminated. Meat can also be contaminated with animal feces during the slaughter process.

The disease is usually spread by eating food contaminated with the bacteria. Unlike other bacteria causing illnesses, *Listeria* bacteria will grow on foods kept at refrigerated temperatures.

### How is Listeriosis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on assessment of clinical symptoms by a health care provider and laboratory testing of a stool sample.

### Who is at risk of Listeriosis infection?

Anyone exposed to the bacteria can become infected. Young children, the elderly, pregnant women and persons with weakened immune systems are at greater risk for more serious disease.

### How can Listeriosis be prevented?

**Use good environmental management.** Flush or discard any stool in the toilet and clean surrounding area using hot water and detergent. A chlorine-based disinfectant is recommended. Proper disposal of farm animal carcasses.

**Practice good personal hygiene.** Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or changing a diaper, after handling animals or contact with animal feces, after handling meats, and before preparing or eating food. Make sure children wash their hands

**Take food safety precautions.** Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Thoroughly cook all meats. Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw meat. Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, and yogurt). Pregnant women and the immunocompromised should avoid processed meats, soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk and smoked fish.

**Drink properly treated water.** Avoid swallowing recreational waters from swimming pools. Do not drink untreated surface water from lakes or streams. Test private well drinking water regularly (once or twice per year).

### How is Listeriosis treated?

Persons with diarrhea should drink a lot of liquids to avoid dehydration, stay home when ill, and practice good personal hygiene like hand washing. Consult your health-care provider for advice and treatment if you have symptoms; prescription medicines may be used.

## **What is the Public Health response?**

Health-care provider, hospitals and laboratories, schools and childcare centres are required to notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, provide advice as necessary, and implement control measures; including exclusion of infected workers in high risk occupations like persons involved in food handling, direct patient care, and care of the young (daycare) or the elderly (institutional settings).

## **Further Information**

Please contact your health-care provider, local Public Health office or Tele-Care 811.